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Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection.

--Matthew Arnold

Philosophy may teach us to bear with equanimity the misfortune of our neighbors, and science resolve the moral sense into a secretion of sugar; but art is what makes the life of each citizen a sacrament and not a speculation, art is what makes the life of the whole race immortal.

-- Oscar Wilde

THE ROYAL DANISH BALLET

Not since the Leningrad Kirov Ballet visited Chicago in December of 1961 have we experienced the same density and profusion of talents as we did recently in the Royal Danish Ballet's recent visit. The expression I heard most from members of those enthusiastic audiences was - "They are so totally different from all other Ballet Companies." Why are they so different? For three very good reasons - one, rarely have we seen such clean and difficult technique tossed off as if it were only fun, - second, never have we seen a company where the mime was a major asset for the entire company - and third, they are superb in the lost art of character dance. Other companies, including the Royal English, the American Ballet Theatre, the Joffrey Company and the Royal Swedish Ballet, are all equally weak in good character work. In most cases bad enough to be embarrassing. The Danes prove that it is possible to excel in all three elements of Dance.

On December 7th of '61 we all found our way out to that miserable Theatre - The Arie Crown - in arctic weather for four days of sheer heaven to see the Kirov perform Shostokovitch's "Seventh Symphony", "Bayerka", "Flames of Paris", "The Sleeping Beauty", "Chopiniana" and "Swan Lake", along with a superb group of character dances. The ballets themselves were not as important as were their wonderful dancers.

The dancers were the Irresistible Irina Kolpakova, the only dancer I have seen to possess the feminine charm of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Her husband, Vladilen Semenov, the most princely man ever with a smooth and surprising technique that made many people think he was not doing a thing. Alla Sizova,

with her startling ecarte jump, landing through a passe in "Cosair". Youri Soloviev, we were fortunate to see perform the first night but the second, an injury in the Shostokovitch ballet cancelled him out for the balance of the run. His death a couple of years ago was officially announced as a suicide. Natalie Makarova was a second soloist in that group but made a strong impression. The other dancers I was impressed with and remember were Alexander Pavlov, Ninel Kurpaphine and a divine old character dancer, Iraida Utretskaya, in the mother roles with everything these roles should have to make them as great as the lead roles. So often most companies use a weak corp member covered up with costume and layers of makeup.

Here are impressions of the Kirov written in my journal at that time -- "great elegance and poetry -- no movement was without epaulement -- clean and precise foot and leg work -- silken movement across the floor -- tremendously strong movements without losing the grace and line of the arms -- wonderful feet and arms -- incredibly difficult technique without "asking" for applause -- every stage pattern choreographed and with no walking or running into a position -- expressive and natural mime connecting all movements -- honest character work when called for -- always dancing for the pleasure of dancing -- older dancers in parts meant to be older." Anyone of the above expressions could be said about the Danes. It is all a matter of taste and always working within the framework of the ballet.

In the matter of "how" the technique is performed, there is a great difference in the leg work of the Danes. They capitalize on the ballon (bounce) jumps and in this field, they are the only company with this special quality of jump. They make much of ballonnes, pas cheval, saute basque, rond de jambe en l'air, contretemps, and those enchanting flying brises and the leap with an attitude position in the air. So strong is the influence of the Danes that other dancers and choreographers have forgotten that the same leap can be done with the back leg straight. Another important difference is that the male dancers are not required to do much lifting which probably accounts for their amazing ballon. The male and female roles are more evenly proportioned when dancing together. While the girl is seldom lifted, she may be assisted in some way to heighten a movement or position. At one time the girls working in toe shoes off-toe bothered me but this time they managed the transition so naturally and neatly that I was not disturbed.

One of the more pleasant features of the Bournoville school is that every step is choreographed with a continual pattern of connected steps (not as seen in Balancine and other modern choreographers), so the flow of movement is never interrupted but follows from one step through another.

In the creating of any new art form much valuable knowledge is discarded and forgotten. A certain breaking away from tradition is important but it seems that it is also important that one should "add to" instead of discarding the best of the old. We know that Bournonville spent many years training and performing in the French Ballets of that time - even dancing with Marie Taglioni. As he was also a student of the great dancer and virtuoso, Auguste Vestris, we can assume that he was influenced by the great dancers of his time. Seeing the Bournonville dancers of today helps us to visualize the dancing of Gaetan & Auguste Vestris, Charles Didelot, Jules Perrot and the first danseur noble, Louis Dupre. How wonderful to keep that tradition alive.

The Danish style of dance has a freshness completely their own. They seem to dance for the pleasure of moving rather than to astound for applause. In this sense, Schaufuss and Martin both seem out of place in the company now. Their outside influences are apparent when seen with the company's untainted style.

The company's port de bras leans heavily on the use of epaulement with every arm and head movement - flowing (never thrown), mostly in lower positions and never with affectation or distortion. Arms are especially rounded at all times and directed more toward the audience in an appealing manner. This economy attracts more attention to their joyous and expressive faces. One never sees 'dead' movement in any part of a Danish dancer's body.

In the use of the leg - the frequent use of ballonne - ballotte - rond de jambe en l'air - contretemps - their distinctive leaps and the flying beat combinations could be monotonous if they were not so superlatively executed. They continue to surprise the viewer because rarely does one see these steps so precisely performed and tossed off with as much ease as one might breath. The result is a graceful/playful athleticism in both sexes.

What was more of a surprise to me, was the outburst of enthusiasm from the Chicago audience. Chicago literally went "bananas" for these lovely people. Local musicians working in the orchestra had the same to say for the conductors and other musicians. It has been many a year since such appreciation has been kindled in our Chicago ballet audiences and it may be a long time before we witness it again. We really must thank Geraldine Freund for her daring adventure.

The following quotes from Bournonville's book "My Theatre Life" sets the tone for their performances - especially the line -- "united more of the qualities of dance".

"The dance is an art because it demands vocation, knowledge and ability. It is a fine art because it strives for an ideal,

not only on plastic but also in lyrical respects.....every dancer ought to regard his laborious art as a link in the chain of beauty, as a useful ornament for the stage, and this, in turn, as an important element for the spiritual development of Nation."

And - "There are dancers who possess greater aplomb, elevation and ability to pirouette, who perform character dances with a greater measure of originality, but very few who have united more of the qualities of the dance or possessed greater variety than I, I danced with a manly joi de vivre, and my humor and energy have made the same impression in every theatre. I delighted the audience, and before they admired me, they liked me."

THINGS NICELY SAID

(from correspondence)

How lucky a whole generation of Chicagoans have been. People forget, fame and fortune are bestowed capriciously and even simple appreciation is not to be counted on, but as you consider the body of work you have created, you can certainly count your time well spent. For me, at least, the memories are happy and precious.

Lloyd Tygett

I received the bulk of my training from the Stone and Camryn, who instill a sense of what it is to really dance.

Naomi Sorkin

The love and friendship that surrounded us in those years at the studio (17 North State and 119 North Clark) came from both of you and has never left us.....I now understand all you went through and realize what great teachers you both are.

William Reilly

It seems the things most valuable to me now are what I learned around 185 West Madison Street.

William Maloney

There are so many fond memories of you both as the children were growing up. I feel, as my husband did, that you helped us raise them, not only your direction in the Dance, but the building of Character. For this I am grateful. We always considered you both a dear and valuable friend of the family.

Erna Ehemann